

# *Luke*

## *Lesson #17*

### *Excursus: Judas, the Betrayer*

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# Review

**In Lesson #16 events unfolded exactly as Jesus planned: Judas agreed to betray Jesus; Jesus and his disciples shared the Passover meal; Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane; Jesus appeared before the Sanhedrin; Peter denied Jesus; and the Sanhedrin found Jesus guilty of blasphemy.**

**In a single chapter, events unfolded smoothly, but quickly—with very little drama—as Jesus moved inexorably, but calmly, toward the cross, in control of every moment.**

# Preview

Judas is a problematic character in Scripture, viewed by some as a sinister villain, a “motiveless malignity,” as Samuel Taylor Coleridge described Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello*; by others as a petty thief who steals from the money purse, as the Apostle John claims (John 12: 6), and who, motivated by avarice, betrays the Son of God for 30 pieces of silver; and by yet others, as a loyal character who believes he is helping Jesus, and who is perhaps even following Jesus’ directions.

A disciple from the start, Judas was with Jesus for his entire 3-year public ministry; Judas witnessed Jesus’ teaching, preaching and healing; Judas was present at Peter’s confession of faith; and Judas firmly believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

So why does Judas betray Jesus?

In Lesson #17 we explore the character of Judas, hearing testimony from all four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

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**We encountered Judas Iscariot in our studies of both Matthew and Mark; we meet him here in Luke/Acts; and we will meet him again in the *Gospel according to John*.**

**In our studies of Matthew and Mark we spent considerable time probing Judas' motives for betraying Jesus: even so, he remained an enigmatic, elusive character.**

**In this lesson, we will dig deeper, calling upon all four evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—to provide testimony, and perhaps by listening to them carefully, we will gain additional insight into Judas and his motives.**

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**So, who is this  
fellow, Judas  
Iscairiot?**

**Just the facts,  
please.**

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## Here's what we know about Judas from Scripture

•Judas Iscariot's name: Judas (Hebrew = "Judah," Jacob's 4<sup>th</sup> son); Iscariot (probably from the Hebrew *Îš-Qrîyôth*, "man of Kerioth," a village about 10 miles south of Hebron, mentioned in Joshua 15: 25 as one of the cities in Judah. If that is the case, Judas is the only one of Jesus' 12 disciples not from Galilee.



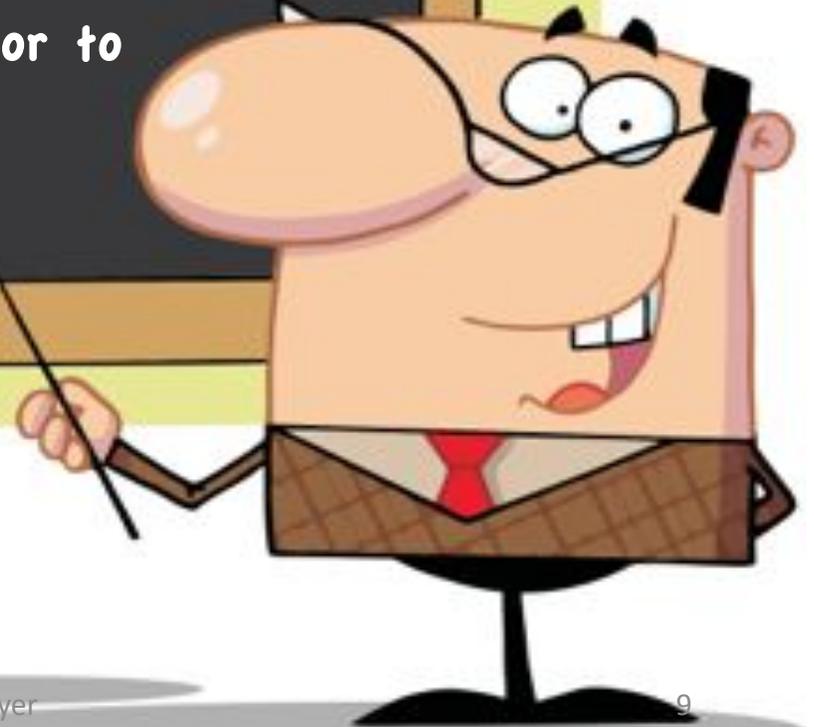


Kerioth (el-Kureitein) archaeology



The only disciple not from Galilee! Humm. That could be significant. Galilee was a hotbed of radical, revolutionary movements; Judah was a much more “conservative” place.

- Judas is the son of Simon Iscariot (John 6:71; 13:26).
- Judas is always listed last in the list of Jesus' twelve disciples; Peter and Andrew, James and John are always listed first.
- His motives for betraying Jesus are unclear in the Gospel accounts, opening the door to considerable speculation.



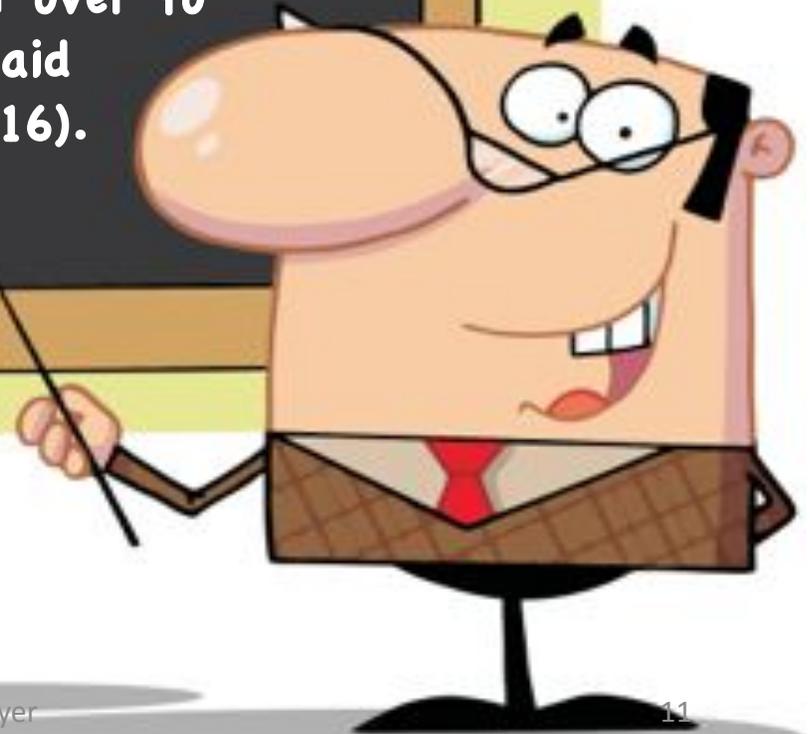


**Listing Judas last among the disciples, suggests that ALL of the gospel writers viewed him as somehow less than the others (especially Peter, Andrew, James and John) or as problematic, someone we should watch closely, a potential “fly in the ointment.”**

- John tells us that Judas “held the money bag and used to steal the contributions” (John 12: 6).

- Satan “enters” Judas, prompting him to act (Luke 22: 3; John 13: 27).

- Judas went to the chief priests: “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” (Matthew 26: 15); and he is paid 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26: 14-16).





- If we are to believe John that Judas *“held the money bag and used to steal the contributions,”* that suggests that Judas had a very “flexible” sense of right and wrong and was little more than a petty thief.
- And if Satan enters Judas, prompting him to act, that suggests two things:
  - 1) that Satan targeted the disciple most susceptible to his influence, and
  - 2) that Judas was not entirely responsible for his own behavior.
- Judas initiates the betrayal by approaching the religious leaders, and they offer him 30 pieces of silver for his actions, appealing to his avarice.



Good thinking, professor!  
But if Judas was little more than a petty thief with an avaricious nature, why did Jesus choose him as a disciple to begin with? Did Jesus set him up, deliberately choosing someone he knew would betray him in order to fulfill Scripture?



Furthermore, both Luke and John tell us that Satan “entered” Judas prior to Judas betraying Jesus. That perhaps diminishes Judas’ culpability, since he was influenced by a much stronger personality than himself.



And what about the money? Exactly how much is 30 pieces of silver? Is it enough to motivate Judas' betrayal?

# 30 Pieces of Silver



Only Matthew specifies the amount of money Judas is given. The Greek word in Matthew 26: 15 is *arguria*, “silver coins,” not specifying what type of coins they were. The best guess is Tyrian *tetrachms*, commonly called “Tyrian shekels.” The above “Tyrian shekel” was minted in Tyre between 18 B.C. and A.D. 68. A Tyrian shekel contained about 14 grams of silver. At today’s value a Tyrian shekel would be worth about \$8.00 (\$15.98/oz.; 1 oz. of silver = 28 grams), so the 30 Tyrian shekels given to Judas would be worth about \$240.

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**\$240 would not have provided much of a motive for betrayal. It must have been something else.**

- When Jesus is condemned and sentenced to death, Judas returns to the chief priests in remorse, saying: “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood,” and he flings the money back at them (Matthew 27: 4-5).
- Judas then “went off and hanged himself” (Matthew 27: 5).





Now, that complicates the case! If Judas betrayed Jesus for malignant motives, why would he then show remorse and “fling” the money back, saying, *“I have sinned in betraying innocent blood”* and then go out and hang himself?



I think we need to go back to the “Murder Book” and follow this case more closely from the start.



**Jacob Jordaens, *The Four Evangelists* (oil on canvas), c. 1625-1630.  
Louvre Museum, Paris.**

## The Bargain

“Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went off to the chief priests to hand him over to them. When they heard him they were pleased and promised to pay him money. Then he looked for an opportunity to hand him over” (Mark 14: 10-11).

“Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over” (Matthew 26: 14-16).

“Now the feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was drawing near, and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to put him to death, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered into Judas, the one surnamed Iscariot, who was counted among the Twelve, and he went to the chief priests and temple guards to discuss a plan for handing him over to them. They were pleased and agreed to pay him money. He accepted their offer and sought a favorable opportunity to hand him over to them in the absence of a crowd” (Luke 22: 1-6).



**Mattia Preti. *Tribute Money* (oil on canvas), c. 1640.  
Brera Art Gallery, Milan, Italy.**

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**Giotto. *Judas Betrays Christ* (tempera on panel), 1304-1306.  
Arena Chapel, Padua.**

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## What do we learn from this comparison?

1. **Mark** gives us the original version, in which we receive the basic, bare-bones facts: Judas initiates the action; the chief priests promise to pay him money.
2. **Matthew** expands the scene, noting that Judas asks to be paid, and we learn the amount: 30 silver coins, in our terms about \$240.
3. **Luke** expands the scene even more, saying that the chief priests were seeking a way to put Jesus to death, but they didn't have a plan. **Satan enters Judas**, and then Judas approaches the religious leaders with a plan of his own, and they agree to pay him.
4. **John** omits the scene entirely.

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**Now, we move on to the next step in our investigation.**

## The Last Supper

“When it was evening, he came with the Twelve. And as they reclined at the table and were eating, Jesus said, ‘Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.’ They began to be distressed and to say to him, one by one, ‘Surely, it is not I?’ He said to them, ‘One of the Twelve, the one who dips with me into the dish. For the Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born’” (Mark 14: 17-21).

“When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, ‘Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely it is not I, Lord?’ He said in reply, ‘He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.’ Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, ‘Surely it is not I, Rabbi? He answered, ‘You have said so.’” (Matthew 26: 20-25).

## The Last Supper, cont.

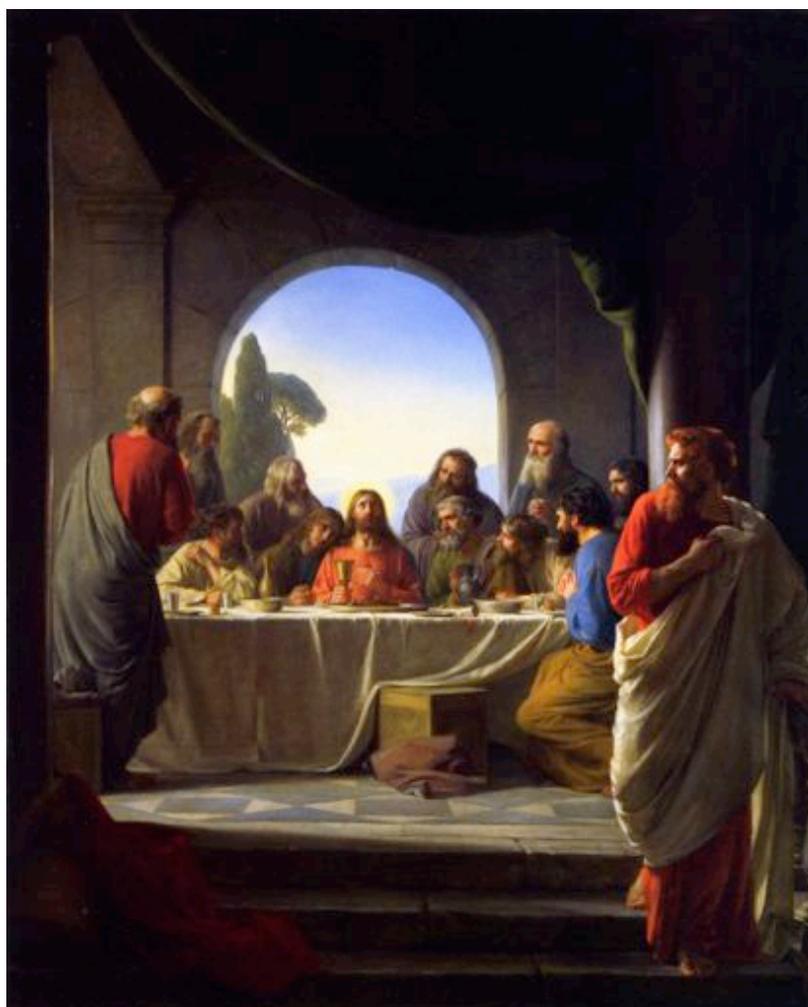
“And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me on the table; for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed.’ And they began to debate among themselves who among them would do such a deed” (Luke 22: 21-23).

“When he had said this, Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant. One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus’ side. So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus’ chest and said to him, ‘Master, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it.’ So he dipped the morsel and [took it and] handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot. **After he took the morsel, Satan entered him.** So Jesus said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly.’ [Now] none of those reclining at table realized why he said this to him. Some thought that since Judas kept the money bag, Jesus had told him, ‘Buy what we need to the feast,’ or to give something to the poor. So he took the morsel and left at once. And it was night” (John 13: 21-30).



**Domenico Ghirlandajo. *Last Supper* (fresco), 1480.  
Chiesa di San Salvatore di Ognissanti [All Saints Church], Florence.**

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**Carl Heinrich Bloch. *The Last Supper* (oil on copper), 1876.  
Museum of National History, Frederiksborg Castle, Hillerød, Denmark.**

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## And what do we learn from this comparison?

1. **Mark** has Jesus announce at the Last Supper that one of the Twelve will betray him. The Apostles respond one-by-one saying, *“Surely, it is not I?”* Jesus answers: *“the one who dips with me into the dish,”* saying that the Son of Man will, indeed, die, but it would be better had his betrayer not been born.

Clearly, Jesus knows that Judas is the one, but how does he know?

2. **Matthew** repeats Mark, adding that Judas says, *“Surely, it is not I, Rabbi?”* with Jesus responding simply, Ζύ εἶπας, [*“You have said it”*].

In Matthew both Jesus and Judas know that the other knows.

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3. **Luke** gives an abbreviated version of Mark and Matthew.
4. **John** gives the most vivid, detailed account. Jesus is deeply troubled, and with his announcement of betrayal, the Twelve are at a loss as to what to say. Peter gestures toward John and motions for him to ask Jesus, “Which one?” Jesus replies, “*The one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it.*” Judas then takes the morsel, and he gets up and leaves. John’s comment is chilling: ἦν δὲ νύξ [“*And it was night*”].

Here, both Jesus and Judas know the other knows, and Judas faces a dramatic moment of decision, a decision that will have eternal consequences, for him and for all of humanity. And he makes his choice.

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**Now, we come to  
the final step in  
Judas' betrayal:  
Jesus' arrest in the  
Garden of  
Gethsemane.**

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## The Kiss of Judas

“Then, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, ‘The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely.’ He came and immediately went over to him and said, ‘Rabbi.’ And he kissed him. At this they laid hands on him and arrested him.” (Mark 14: 43-46).

“While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a large crowd, with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests and the elders of the people. His betrayer had arranged a sign with them, saying, ‘The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him.’ Immediately, he went over to Jesus and said, ‘Hail, Rabbi!’ and he kissed him. Jesus answered him, ‘Friend, do what you have come for.’ Then stepping forward they laid hands on Jesus and arrested him” (Matthew 26: 20-25).

## The Kiss of Judas, cont.

“While he was still speaking, a crowd approached and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas. He went up to Jesus to kiss him. Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’ His disciples realized what was about to happen and they asked, ‘Lord, shall we strike with a sword?’ And one of them struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said in reply, ‘Stop, no more of this!’ Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him. And Jesus said to the chief priests and temple guards and elders who had come for him, ‘Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? Day after day I was with you in the temple area, and you did not seize me; but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness.’ After arresting him they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest; Peter was following at a distance” (Luke 22: 52-54).

## The Kiss of Judas, cont.

“When he had said this, Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered. Judas his betrayer also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and said to them, ‘Whom are you looking for?’ They answered him, ‘Jesus the Nazorean.’ He said to them, ‘I AM.’ Judas his betrayer was also with them. When he said to them, ‘I AM,’ they turned away and fell to the ground. So he again asked them, ‘Whom are you looking for?’ They said, ‘Jesus the Nazorean.’ Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I AM. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.’ This was to fulfill what he had said, ‘I have not lost any of those you gave me.’ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?’ So the band of soldiers, the tribune, and the Jewish guards seized Jesus, bound him, and brought him to Annas first” (John 18: 10-12).

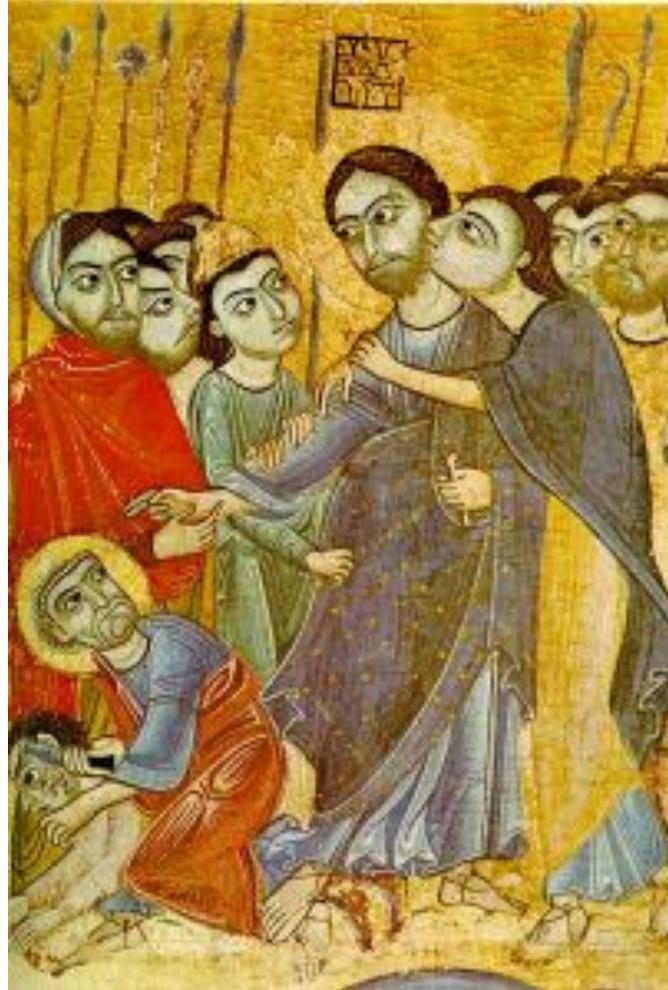
Peter chopping of  
the ear of Malchus



The Kiss

“The Kiss of Judas Iscariot” (colored engraving) from *Heures de Charles d’Angoulême*, c. 1503-1508. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

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**Anonymous. *Kiss of Judas Iscariot* (painting), 12<sup>th</sup> century.  
Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.**

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**Carravagio. *The Taking of Christ* (oil on canvas), c. 1598.  
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.**

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## Once again we must ask, what do we learn from this comparison?

1. **Mark** again gives us the naked facts: Judas leads an armed crowd sent by the religious leaders to arrest Jesus; he greets Jesus with a kiss, the signal that “this is the man”; and the authorities arrest Jesus.
2. **Matthew** repeats Mark, with the addition that Jesus says to Judas, *“Friend, do what you have come for.”*
3. **Luke** adds considerable detail, having Jesus point out the irony of Judas betraying Jesus with a kiss; Peter cutting off the right ear of the high priest’s servant and Jesus healing him; Jesus’ intervention; and finally Jesus’ arrest, with Peter following the crowd to the high priest’s house.

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4. **John** gives considerably more information, adding topographical detail; Jesus' "I AM" exchange with the crowd; Jesus requesting the release of his disciples; and the name of the high priest's servant, Malchus.

**In all four gospels Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss, and then we have varying degrees of detail and chaos as Jesus is arrested.**



**So, where does that  
bring us in our  
investigation?**



1. The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus, believing that the very survival of the nation was at stake, but not knowing how to do it without causing a riot.
2. Judas went on his own initiative to the religious leaders, with a plan to have Jesus arrested quietly, prompted by Satan.
3. The religious leaders agreed to the plan, and they offered Judas 30 silver coins, about \$240.
4. Jesus knew what Judas had done, and after the Last Supper, Judas knew that Jesus knew.
5. Late at night Judas leads a large crowd to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he knew Jesus would be, identifies him with a kiss, and the authorities arrest Jesus, taking him to the home of the high priest, where an executive session of the Sanhedrin would charge him with the capital crime of blasphemy.

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So, we know the facts of the case, but what was Judas' motivation for betraying Jesus?

I've often wondered that myself.





**That's a very good question, for it really takes us to the crux of the matter, and Scripture gives us some insights.**

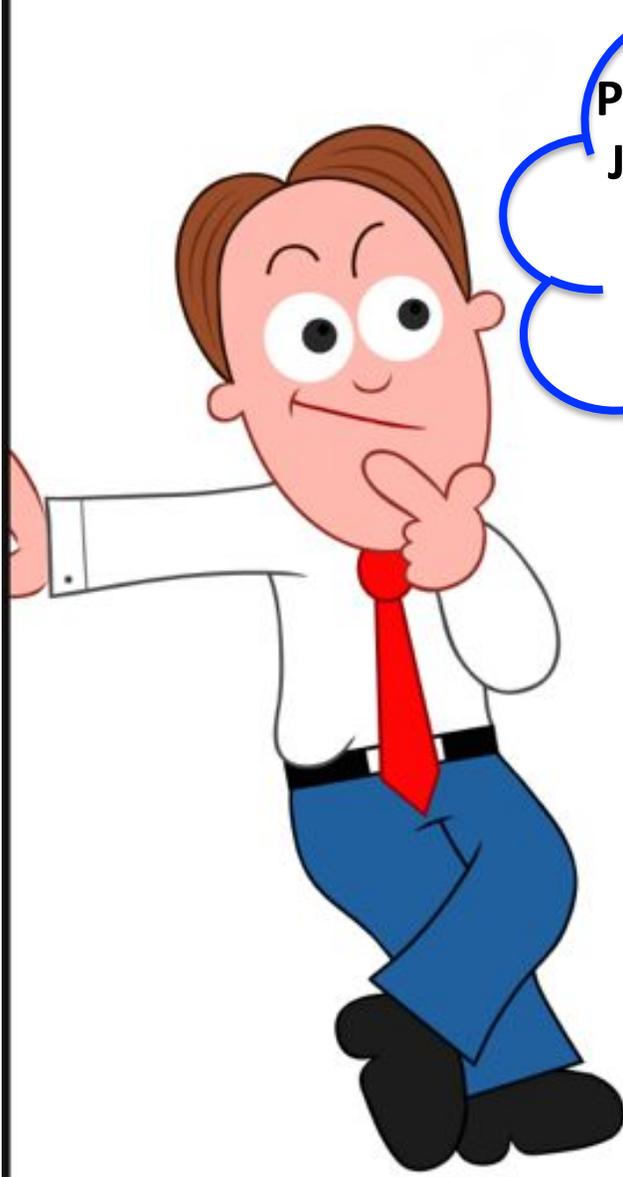


- We know that Judas was the only one of the Twelve not from Galilee. He was from Kiriath, a village about 10 miles south of Hebron in Judah. He was an outsider.
- We know that he was “keeper of the money purse,” entrusted by Jesus with the group’s common funds, and John tells us that he used to steal from it.
- John also tells us that Jesus recently chastised Judas publically at a dinner party at Bethany.

## The Dinner Party

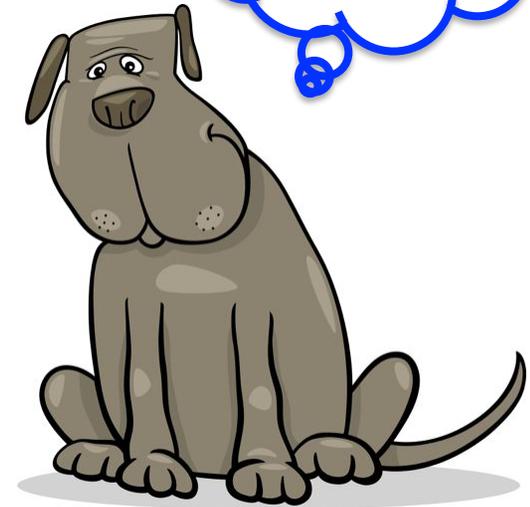
“Six days before Passover Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there, and Martha served, while Lazarus was one of those reclining at table with him. Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then Judas the Iscariot, one [of] his disciples, and the one who would betray him said, ‘Why was this oil not sold for three hundred days’ wages and given to the poor?’ He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief and held the money bag and used to steal the contributions. Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone. Let her keep this for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.’”

(John 12: 1-8)



Perhaps that's the motive! Maybe Judas felt humiliated and "stung" by Jesus' public rebuke, Judas' anger prompting him to betray the Lord.

I'd be pretty angry if I were him!



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**It's very difficult to discern someone's motives, even in the best of circumstances. With Judas, it's even more difficult. Here are some other possibilities:**

- As little more than a petty thief, Judas saw an opportunity to betray Jesus for the money the religious leaders paid him.
- Judas firmly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but he grew disillusioned at Jesus' actions, at his criticizing the religious leaders rather than leading a revolt against the Roman authorities.
- Judas believed that Jesus needed to be restrained until after Passover, agreeing with the religious leaders that Jesus' behavior would likely cause a catastrophic riot at the festival.
- Some even suggest that Judas was simply following Jesus' instructions, thus ensuring that Jesus would be turned over and put to death, in order to fulfill Scripture.

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**The late 2<sup>nd</sup>-century Coptic papyrus, “The Gospel of Judas,” discovered during the 1970s near *Beni Masah* in Egypt. This gospel portrays Judas as acting on Jesus’ instructions, the only one of Jesus’ disciples who truly understood him.**

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**That's interesting,  
my dear Watson,  
but where does it  
lead us?**

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**Regardless of Judas' motives for betraying Jesus, he clearly did not anticipate the results: Jesus' condemnation and crucifixion.**

**When it happens, Judas is stunned! He rushes back to the religious leaders and hurls the money at them, saying, "*I have sinned in betraying innocent blood!*"**

**Only Matthew reports on Judas' suicide:**

## The Death of Judas

“Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, deeply regretted what he had done. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.’ They said, ‘What is that to us? Look to it yourself.’ Flinging the money into the temple, he departed and went off and hanged himself.”

(Matthew 27: 3-5)



*Death of Judas Iscariot (fresco), 1510.*

Église Saint-Sébastien de Plampinet, Névache, Provence et Côte D'Azur, France.

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**Luke gives a different account, however, in Acts 1: 15-20.**

## The Death of Judas

“During those days Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (there was a group of about one hundred and twenty persons in the one place). He said, ‘My brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled which the holy Spirit spoke beforehand through the mouth of David, concerning Judas, who was the guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was numbered among us and was allotted a share in this ministry. He bought a parcel of land with the wages of his iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his intestines spilled out. This became known to everyone who lived in Jerusalem, so that the parcel of land was called in their language “Akeldame,” that is, Field of Blood. For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“Let his encampment become desolate,  
and may no one dwell in it.”

and

“May another take his office.”

(Acts 1: 15-20)



**Whatever Judas' motivations were for betraying Jesus, the fact is, he did. And Peter's words in Acts sealed Judas' reputation—forever.**

**History's judgment of Judas is perhaps best expressed in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, when Dante and Virgil reach the 9<sup>th</sup> circle of hell and see Satan himself, encased in ice:**



Botticelli. *Dante Alighieri* (tempera on canvas),  
1495. Private Collection, Geneva.

**Oh, how amazed I was when I looked up  
and saw a head—one head wearing three faces!  
One was in front (and that was a bright red),**

**the other two attached themselves to this one  
just above the middle of each shoulder,  
and at the crown all three were joined in one . . .**

**In each of his three mouths he crunched a sinner,  
with teeth like those that rake the hemp and flax,  
keeping three sinners constantly in pain;**

**the one in front—the biting he endured  
was nothing like the clawing that he took:  
sometimes his back was raked clean of its skin.**

**“That soul up there who suffers most of all,”  
my guide [Vergil] explained, “is Judas Iscariot:  
the one with head inside and legs out kicking.**

***Divine Comedy, “Inferno,”  
Canto 34: 37-42; 55-63.***

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**Well, that about  
wraps it up: case  
closed!**



**William Etty. *Judas Iscariot* (oil on board), c. 1843.  
Museums Sheffield, Sheffield, England.**

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# Questions for discussion and thought

1. What significance, if any, do you find in Judas being the only disciple who is not from Galilee?
2. What significance, if any, do you find in Judas scolding Mary of Bethany for anointing Jesus with a very expensive perfume: *“Why was this oil not sold for three hundred day’s wages and given to the poor?”* (John 12: 5)?
3. What significance, if any, do you find in Jesus saying to Judas at the Last Supper: *“What you are going to do, do quickly”* (John 13: 37)?
4. What do you think motivated Judas to betray Jesus?
5. Is there any other character in Scripture who hangs himself? If so, what is the significance?

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